

Between the waters...

Beshalach 5782/2022

I saw a post on social media that shared a picture of the text of Az Yashir, the song at the sea, from a Torah scroll. In the moments following the splitting of the sea, and the full salvation of the Jewish people, Moses and the men, and Miriam and the women, burst out into song, praising Hashem. At the very end of the song, we are told that the Jewish people crossed between the sea, on dry land. What is interesting is that in the writing of the text, which is split into various stanzas (you can google it to get a full picture), the phrase itself is split with the Jewish people actually written 'in between the seas'. The actual text shows them walking in between the waters¹.

This verse² and its subsequent scribing in the Torah got me thinking about the allegorical meanings of the Jewish people walking between the waters, not just in the moment of fleeing from the Egyptians and amidst the miracles of the Almighty, but more generally.

Both the Seforno³ and the Chizkuni⁴ note that the Jewish people burst into song while they were still in the midst of the miracle. The waters were around them, the Egyptians were pursuing them, they were not yet saved, and yet, they had perfect faith that God would bring them to salvation.

Chief Rabbi of United Synagogues of the British Commonwealth, Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis notes that the entire song of the sea was a song that praises God, inspiring future generations to call out in praise. But what is interesting is his quotation of Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, that this praise of God, is actually that we will become a home for God⁵.

The Gur Aryeh furthers the idea of praise and song, and says that it was not done out of obligation but rather out of a deep love and desire of God⁶.

Taking these two ideas, I want to posit something. The mission of the Jew is to understand that there are always troubled waters, raging against the dry land, and yet, we have a sacred mission to establish God's presence on that dry land, becoming a home for God, pushing back against the storming seas, and spontaneously declaring praise for God.

This is perhaps strengthened by seeing the Rashi, both on the actual recounting of the sea splitting⁷, and again in the Tehillim⁸ where it is mentioned again, where he notes that all the oceans of the world split at the same time. Wherever we are in the world, there will always be these raging waters, but at the same time, there will always be dry land in which to establish God's presence.

Finally, the Kedushat Levi, noting a midrash, comments that the oceans themselves rebuffed Moshe, telling him that they were created first, and that he is just mortal. God reminds the ocean who is really in charge⁹. Yes, the Jewish people are mortal, but when we bring Godliness into the world, we have the power to rebuff nature, to push those seas back, and to find the dry land on which to establish ourselves and to build a true home for God to dwell in the world.